MARVEL COMICS
X-MEN UNLIMITED
JUN #19
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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DEEP IN THE BACKWOODS OF WINZELDORF, GERMANY...
<BY THE HOARY HOSTS AND THE UNHOLY GHOSTS...>⊗
⊗ TRANSLATED FROM A LITTLE KNOWN, ANCIENT-GERMANIC TRIBAL DIALECT.
<FOR THE FIRE THAT BURNS AND THE ORB THAT TURNS...>
TSSSSSSSS
<ACROSS THE WAY THAT WINDS AND THE SPECTER DIVINE...>
<BENEATH THE STARS ON HIGH AND MOTHER MOON'S WATCHFUL EYE...>
10 TON

<...I COMMIT YOUR MORTAL SOUL TO THE TIDES OF TIME...>
FEUER... GUMMI... HAUS...
<WH-WHAT WILL BECOME OF THEM? OF US?>
JA! <WH-WHAT MAKES US SO VALUABLE?>
<YOUR SOULS, KIERKEGAARD.>
<MY STRENGTH EBBS... MY POWERS FADE. SACRIFICE RESTORES THEM.>
<IF IT WILL APPEASE YOUR TROUBLED SOUL, FRIEND -- KNOW THIS...>
<YOUR SACRIFICE IS NOT IN VAIN. FOR MINE IS A MISSION OF MERCY, AND...>
<...FATES BE CLEMENT...>
<...ABSOLUTION.>
SHUNK

ON ANY OTHER DAY, THE MUIR ISLAND RESEARCH CENTER -- OFF THE COAST OF CAPE WRATH, SCOTLAND...
...IS A WORLD-RENOWNED FACILITY DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF GENETIC ANOMALIES AND SUB-ATOMIC MYSTERIES...
...AS WELL AS HOME TO A TEAM OF INTERNATIONAL MUTANT HEROES KNOWN AS **EXCALIBUR.**
TODAY, HOWEVER...
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! CHILDREN OF ALL AGES!
IF YOU'D KINDLY DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE CENTER OF THE BIG TOP...
...WHERE *DER JAHRMARKT* IS PROUD TO PRESENT THE HIGH-FLYING, DEATH-DEFYING ACROBATIC ANTICS OF --

UNFORGIVEN

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-- THE NIGHTCRAWLER!
...IT'S THE SITE OF A ONE-MAN CIRCUS.
KURT WAGNER FLIES THROUGH THE AIR WITH THE GREATEST OF EASE.
RAISED IN THE SPOTLIGHT, SWINGING FROM TRAPEZE TO TRAPEZE, HIS TIMING -- HIS SENSE OF SPATIAL JUDGMENT...
...IS SO KEENLY ATTUNED THAT HE CAN ANTICIPATE THE BAR'S APPROACH WITHIN MILLISECONDS OF ITS REACHING HIS GRASP.
YET, AS ACCOMPLISHED AN AERIALIST AS EXCALIBUR'S SWASHBUCKLING LEADER MAY BE, ALL THE TRAINING IN THE WORLD CANNOT PREPARE HIM...
WAS IST --?!
...FOR THE HORROR AWAITING HIM BELOW!
THE TRAPEZE -- IT JUST DEMATERIALIZED!
OMIGOD! THERE'S NO NET!
HE'S GONNA DIE!
AIIEEE!

BUT ACROBATIC SKILL IS BUT ONE OF THIS DARING YOUNG MAN'S MANY TALENTS...
BAMF
TA-DAAA!
AMAZING!!!
YAY!!!
HOW DOES HE DO IT?!?
TRADE SECRET.
AND SECRETS HAVE EVER BEEN THE SZARDOS FAMILY'S STOCK-IN-TRADE -- JA, BOY?
S - SABU -- MY ACROBATIC MENTOR? YOU'RE NOT PART OF THIS SCENARIO...
COMPUTER -- TERMINATE HOLO-PROGRAM.
UNABLE TO COMPLY. REGISTERING INCREASING LEVELS OF EXTRANORMAL INTERFERENCE...
SOME SPECTERS FROM THE PAST JUST WON'T DISAPPEAR.

"EXTRANORMAL INTERFERENCE"...?
NIGHTMARE!
YOU DARE THREATEN US AGAIN, DEMON?
NIGHTMARE RECENTLY TORMENTED OUR HEROES IN EXCALIBUR 119.
Oh, *I* DARE...THOUGH I AM NOT THE DEMON YOU PRESUME ME TO BE.
NIGHTMARE WAS KIND ENOUGH TO GATHER THE NECESSARY *"INTELLIGENCE"* FOR THIS LITTLE ENCOUNTER.
THOUGH I ADMIRE HIS *PANACHE* FOR INTERROGATION, I MUST SAY...
...YOU CUT ME TO THE QUICK, MISTAKING ONE AS RESPLENDENT AS I FOR THAT SHADOWY WRETCH!
THERE. THAT'S BETTER.
ADMIT IT. *THIS*... IS A HANDSOME DEVIL!

BELASCO!
YOU REMEMBER. HOW NICE.
WHY ARE YOU HERE, MONSTER? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
TO MAKE A *DEAL.* IN EXCHANGE FOR PERMANENT CUSTODY OF THE *WINDING WAY,* I OFFER YOU *THIS*...
MOTHER!
RELEASE HER, FIEND! OR, I SWEAR...
SAVE YOUR *OATHS,* BOY. THEY MEAN NOTHING TO ME.
YOUR MOTHER'S ACTIONS PERVERT THE SACRED PATH TO MYSTICAL EMPOWERMENT FROM WHICH HER SORCERY IS DRAWN.

BEHOLD... THE LEGACY OF *MARGALI SZARDOS!*
MURDER. DECEPTION. MANIPULATION.
SHE BREEDS A LEGACY OF CORRUPTION -- DESECRATING THE WINDING WAY -- HANDED DOWN FROM MOTHER...
...TO *DAUGHTER.*
...MEIN GOTT...
...AMANDA DID THIS?!
YOU *LIE!*
MY ADOPTIVE MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT OF THE *DARK ARTS* HAS EVER BEEN FOR BENEVOLENT PURPOSES... TO *HELP,* NOT *HARM!*
AND SO HAS MY *SISTER'S!*
PEDDLE YOUR ILLUSIONS ELSEWHERE, BELASCO. I'M NOT BUYING.
SUIT YOURSELF, MISFIT. BUT TELL ME...
...DO YOU NOT STILL WONDER *WHY* -- AND TO *WHERE* -- YOUR BELOVED *AMANDA* DISAPPEARED?⊗
THE ANSWER AWAITS YOU...
⊗ EXCALIBUR 108 FRANK
...AT *"HOME."*
POOF

RACING THE CLOCK, NIGHTCRAWLER READIES HIMSELF FOR THE COMING CONFLICT.
THIS MUST BE A TRAP.
HISTORY HAS PROVEN BELASCO A PRINCE OF LIES. THAT WILL NEVER CHANGE...
...WILL IT?
THOUGH SHE RAISED ME AS HER OWN SON, MARGALI HAS -- ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION -- GIVEN ME CAUSE TO DOUBT HER GOOD INTENTION.
WHY, THE LAST TIME WE MET WAS AS FOES WHEN SHE TRIED RELEASING THAT ANCIENT DEMON BENEATH LONDON.⊗
I UNDERSTAND THE ARCANE PRACTICES IN WHICH SHE AND AMANDA DABBLE CAN BECOME A HIGHWAY TO HELL FOR THE UNDISCIPLINED...
...I JUST NEVER THOUGHT AMANDA MIGHT SUCCUMB TO THE "DARK SIDE."
⊗EXCALIBUR 100.
IT WOULD ACCOUNT FOR HER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE, THOUGH.
ACH, BELASCO HAD TO BE INVOLVED! WHY NOT SOME OTHER DEVIL WITH WHICH MY FRIENDS AND I DON'T SHARE A HISTORY?
THE SOUL OF PIOTR'S DECEASED SISTER, ILLYANA... KITTY'S SPIRITUAL CORRUPTION. ALL THAT AND MORE AWAITS IN LIMBO.
LIMBO.
HOW CAN I ASK MY FRIENDS TO ACCOMPANY ME WHEN THAT TIMELESS REALM HOLDS NIGHTMARES FOR THEM FROM WHICH THERE IS NO WAKING..?
BETTER I SHOULD TRAVEL ALONE.
COMPUTER -- ACTIVATE THE MIDNIGHT RUNNER'S AUTO-NAV INTERFACE. AUTHORIZATION CODE: WAGNER OMEGA FOUR.
AUTHORIZATION CONFIRMED. PLEASE STATE YOUR DESTINATION.
WINZELDORF, GERMANY...
BAMF

LIMBO? *ALONE..?*
IT'S LUDICROUS, PIOTR!
I MEAN, WHO *BETTER* TO JOIN HIM IN CONFRONTING BELASCO THAN *US?*
WE KNOW THE DRILL IN LIMBO. WE'VE BEEN THERE. TOGETHER, WE COULD TAKE THAT ONE-ARMED PSYCHO OUT, NO PROBLEM!
NOT TO MENTION THE FACT WE OWE HIM SOME BIG TIME PAYBACK FOR *ILLYANA* -- YOUR SISTER... MY BEST FRIEND.⊗
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS EVEN AN ISSUE...
⊗ SEE UXM 160 AND THE MAGIK L.S. FOR DETAILS ---FRANK
"HOWEVER *ILLOGICAL* THIS MAY SEEM, KATYA -- AND HOWEVER DIFFICULT IT IS FOR NIGHTCRAWLER TO ADMIT TO US AT THE MOMENT --
"-- I'M SURE HE HAS HIS *REASONS.*"
COMPUTER -- ENGAGE *AUTOPILOT* FLIGHT PLAN ALPHA BETA ONE...
ACTIVATING AUTOPILOT SEQUENCE --
SQUAKK
BELAY THE ORDER, COMPUTER.
HE'S JUST BEEN TEMPORARILY *GROUNDED.*
BZZZT
KATZCHEN, NEIN!
I SPENT AN HOUR PROGRAMMING THAT FLIGHT PLAN! YOU KNOW YOUR *"PHASING"* DISRUPTS TECHNOLOGY --
-- COULDN'T YOU HAVE JUST USED THE *DOOR?*

MAYBE.
BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU WOULD'VE TAKEN OFF WITHOUT ME.
KURT, TOVARISCH -- WE'RE HERE FOR YOU. YOU SHOULD NOT DO THIS TO YOURSELF.
ACTUALLY, PIOTR -- I *SHOULD.*
THIS IS A *FAMILY* MATTER. I'D RATHER NOT INVOLVE *STRANGERS.*
"STRANGERS"..?
THAT *REALLY* HURTS.
AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER -- AS X-MEN... AS EXCALIBUR... AS *FRIENDS* --
-- I WOULD'VE THOUGHT *WE'RE* FAMILY, TOO.
GUESS NOT.
KITTY, PIOTR -- WAIT! YOU MISUNDERSTAND --!
ACH...

AND *AWAY* HE GOES...
POOR BOY'S GOING TO BE HEARTBROKEN WHEN HE DISCOVERS THE SINFULLY DELICIOUS EVIL THAT DAUGHTER OF YOURS IS UP TO, MARGALI DEAR.
I WONDER WHAT KIND OF ***STRESS*** THAT'S GOING TO PUT ON YOUR LITTLE FAMILY..?
A GREAT DEAL, I WOULD IMAGINE, MASTER!
SILENCE, YOU MISSHAPEN IMP! WHEN I *WANT* YOUR OPINION --
-- I'LL *GIVE* IT TO YOU!
YIKES!
BAMF

WHY SO *QUIET*, OLD GIRL? ***CAT*** GOT YOUR TONGUE?
NO, I'D KNOW IF THAT PESKY LITTLE KITTY'D BEEN SNIFFING AROUND THE CASTLE AGAIN...
OR, HAVE YOU FINALLY ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT WITH THE ***SOULSWORD*** IN MY POSSESSION...
...I HAVE USURPED *YOUR* POSITION AS THE WINDING WAY'S ***CUSTODIAN?***
YOUR BODY CERTAINLY TESTIFIES TO THAT, MY DEAR.
COVERED IN SWEAT AND FILTH... WHY YOUR POWERS MUST NEARLY BE DEPLETED FOR YOU TO LOOK SUCH A SIGHT!
WHAT WITH YOU BEING SO IMAGE CONSCIOUS.
MUST HURT LIKE THE *DICKENS*...
NOT AS MUCH AS YOU'RE GONNA HURT WHEN I BREAK OUT OF HERE, CRETIN!
YOU HAVE NO IDEA ***WHO*** YOU'RE MESSING WITH...

MEANWHILE, AT THE REAL DER JAHRMARKT CIRCUS...
HOW IRONIC. A CAREER IN THE CIRCUS AND I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO ENTER THE BIG TOP.
I KNOW AMANDA'S INNOCENT. SHE MUST BE.
I JUST DIDN'T THINK I'D BE SO NERVOUS TO CONFRONT HER ABOUT IT.
GUTEN ABEND? ANYBODY --
-- HOME..?
FIRST, THERE IS NOTHING. THEN, AS IF FROM NOWHERE...
...A PRESENCE.
SILENT AS THE SHADOWS DRAPED ABOUT HER...
...SHE SLIDES INTO THE DIM CANDLELIGHT WITH SUPERNATURAL POISE, HER GRACE SHAMING EVEN THE DEFTEST BALLERINAS.
HER GAIT BELIES HER YOUTH.
SHE IS SUPPLE... SPECTRAL... SUBLIME...
...AND THE LAST PERSON KURT WAGNER EXPECTED TO SEE UNDER THAT HOOD...
I KNEW YOU'D COME...

THOUGH PART OF HIM COULDN'T CARE LESS RIGHT NOW.
AMANDA!
ACH, LEIBCHEN! IT'S BEEN *FOREVER!*
YOU'VE NO IDEA HOW WORRIED I'VE BEEN!
PIOTR TOLD ME YOU WEREN'T *"FEELING YOURSELF,"* BUT DID YOU REALLY HAVE TO JUST UP AND DISAPPEAR SIMPLY TO *PROVE* IT?
HOW SO UNLIKE YOU! AND AFTER ALL YOU AND I --
KURT, PLEASE. NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR CELEBRATION.
OF COURSE IT IS! WE'RE *TOGETHER* AGAIN! I'VE MISSED *YOU!* YOU'VE MISSED *ME!*
H-HAVEN'T YOU..?
WHAT'S WRONG, AMANDA? THERE'S SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT TELLING ME...

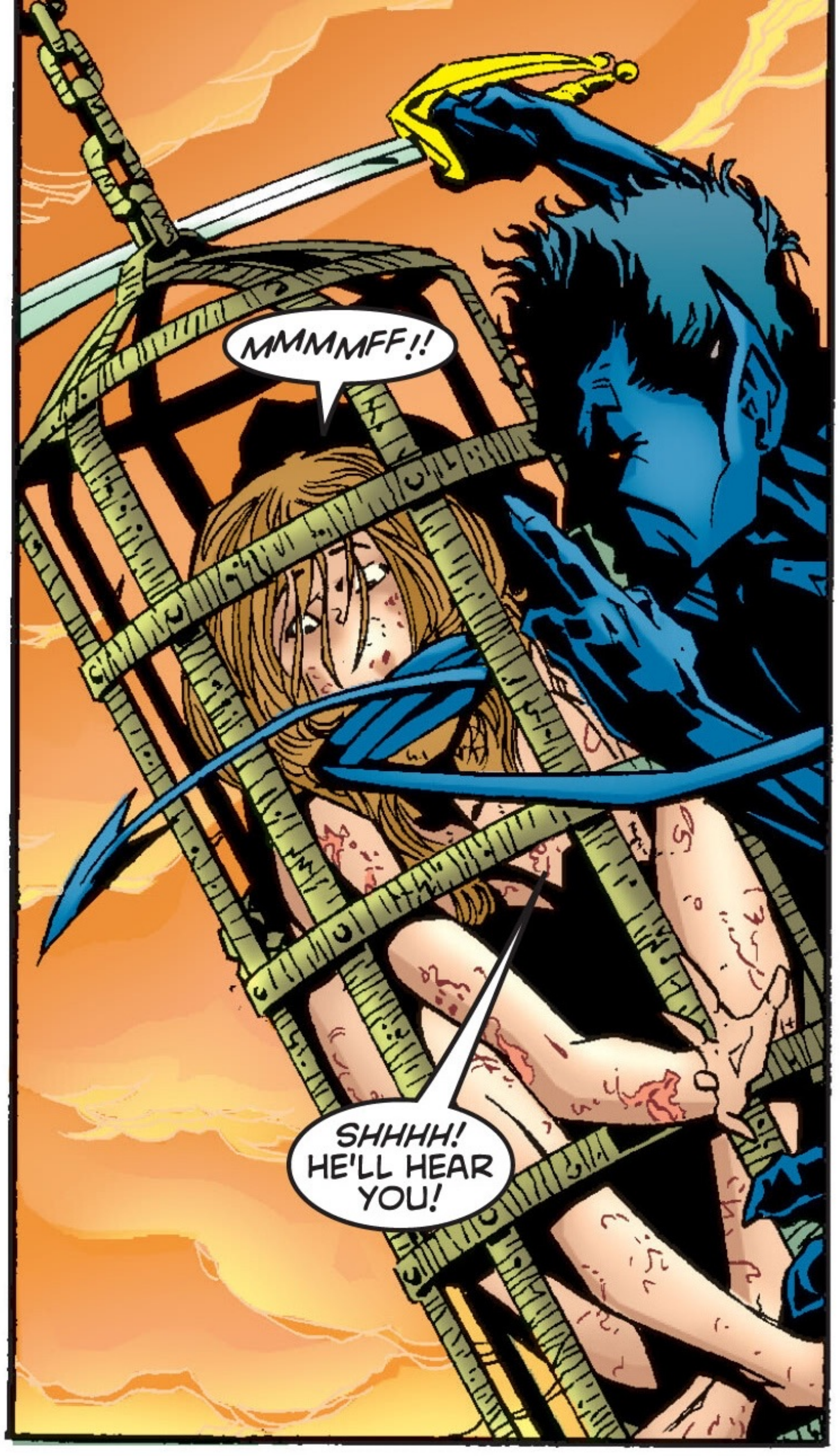
AND WITH GOOD REASON. LOOK!
RRRUNCH
LEIBER GOTT!
"SHE BREEDS A LEGACY OF CORRUPTION... HANDED DOWN FROM MOTHER...TO *DAUGHTER*."
THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING...
BUT IT *IS*, KURT. BELASCO HAS THROWN THE GAUNTLET. FIRST BLOOD IS *HIS*.
LAST BLOOD WILL BE *OURS*. TOGETHER, WE'LL MAKE THAT SORRY EXCUSE FOR A SORCERER PAY!
BUT TO ENSURE VICTORY, BLOOD MUST BE LET, *FAMILIAL* BLOOD.
"PLEASE, KURT -- DO ME A FAVOR AS YOU DID FOR OUR BROTHER, *STEFAN*, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.⊗
"SWEAR THE *VENGEANCE OATH!*
"GIVE ME YOUR *BLOOD!*"
⊗ AS SEEN IN UNCANNY X-MEN ANNUAL 4

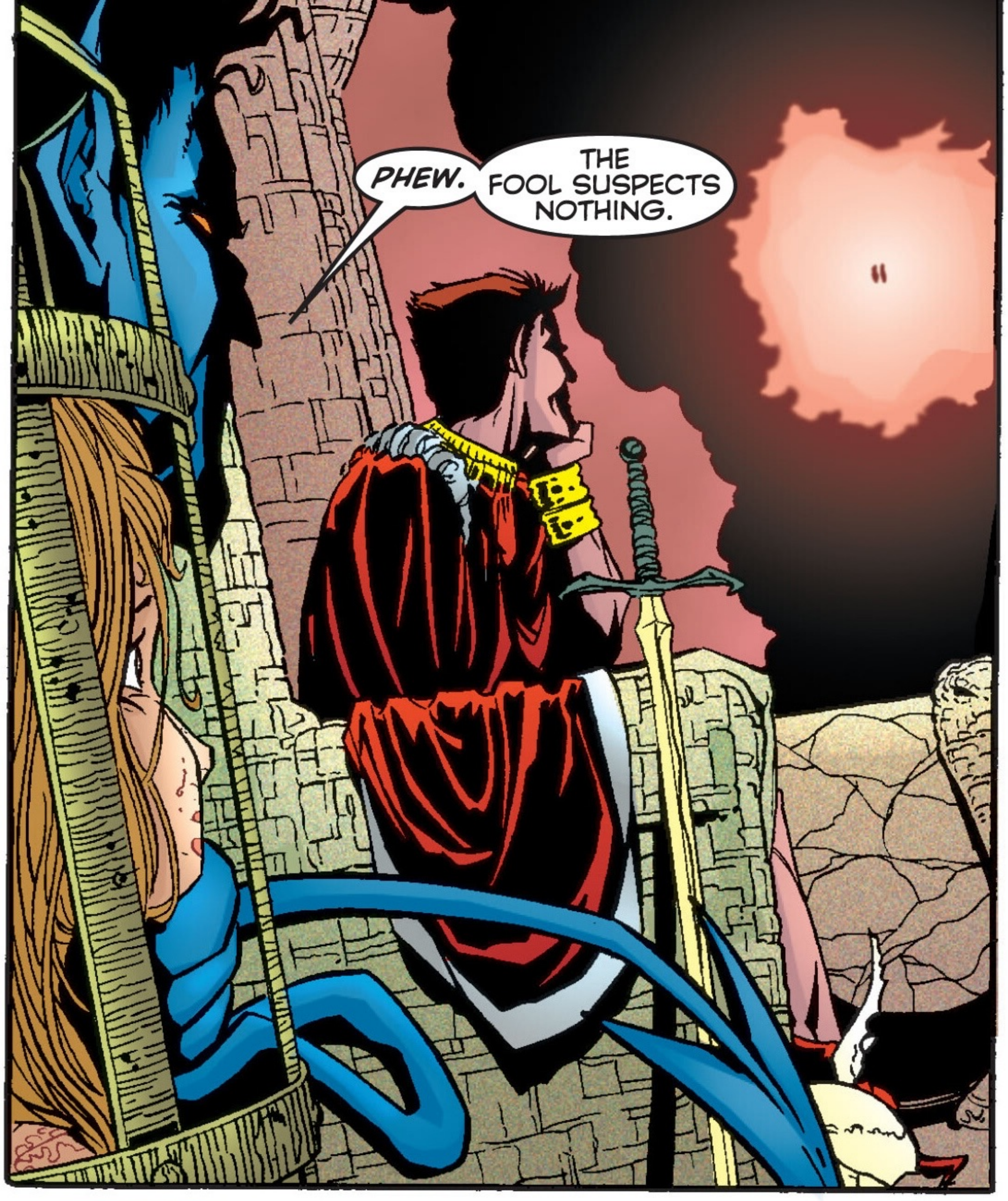
THE PORTAL TO LIMBO OPENS. TIME IS SHORT. WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?
WITH THE SOULSWORD, BELASCO COULD USURP... ***MOTHER'S...*** POSITION ON THE WINDING WAY. YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW ***DISASTROUS*** THAT WOULD BE.
IF YOU CAN FORGIVE YOURSELF THE GUILT OF NOT HELPING THE WOMAN WHO SAVED YOUR LIFE AS A BABY, THEN ***GO.***
I'LL RESCUE HER.
ALONE.
WELL, WHEN YOU PUT IT *THAT* WAY...
I DON'T LIKE THIS. WHEN LAST I PERFORMED SUCH A RITE, I HAD TO TAKE MY BROTHER'S LIFE.
I PRAY TO GOD AMANDA WILL BE SPARED SUCH A FATE.
OUCH! NOW WHAT..?
BLOOD IN EACH POINT OF THE ***PENTAGRAM*** WILL SAFEGUARD OUR PASSAGE.
DONE.
I THOUGHT *WHITE* MAGIC WAS YOUR FORTE, AMANDA. SINCE WHEN DO YOU PRACTICE *BLACK* MAGIC?
SINCE THIS IS WHAT IT TAKES TO DEFEAT A NETHER-LORD LIKE BELASCO.
SO, TO *DEFEAT* A DEMON --?
ONE MUST BECOME A DEMON. NOW, BRACE YOURSELF...
...THIS MAY ***HURT...***

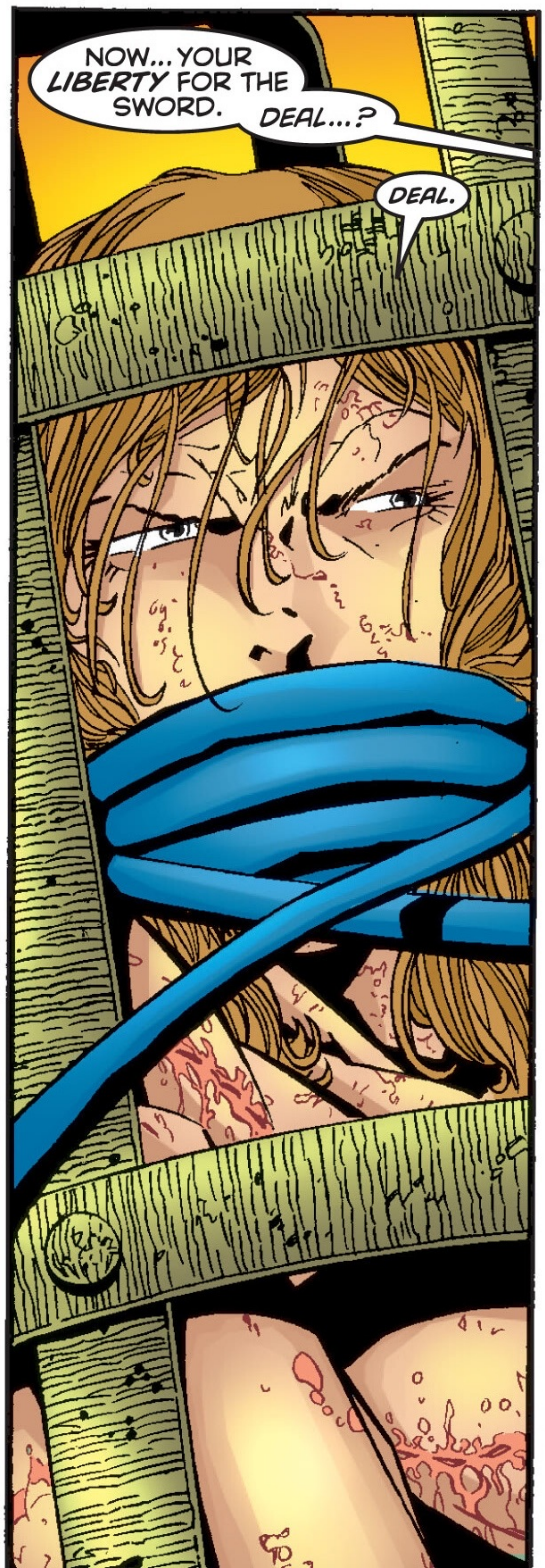
NOT BAD. NO MORE DISORIENTING THAN MY OWN *TELEPORTATION.*
BEEN PRACTICING?
YOUR FREQUENT INTERDIMENSIONAL TRAVELS HAVE REINFORCED YOUR TOLERANCE, NO DOUBT. YOU'RE *LUCKY.*
I'M *"LUCKY"* JUST BEING HERE WITH *YOU,* LEIBCHEN...
THAT WAS A PASS, Y'KNOW.
KURT... *PLEASE.* WE'RE HERE.
UNGLAUBLICH!

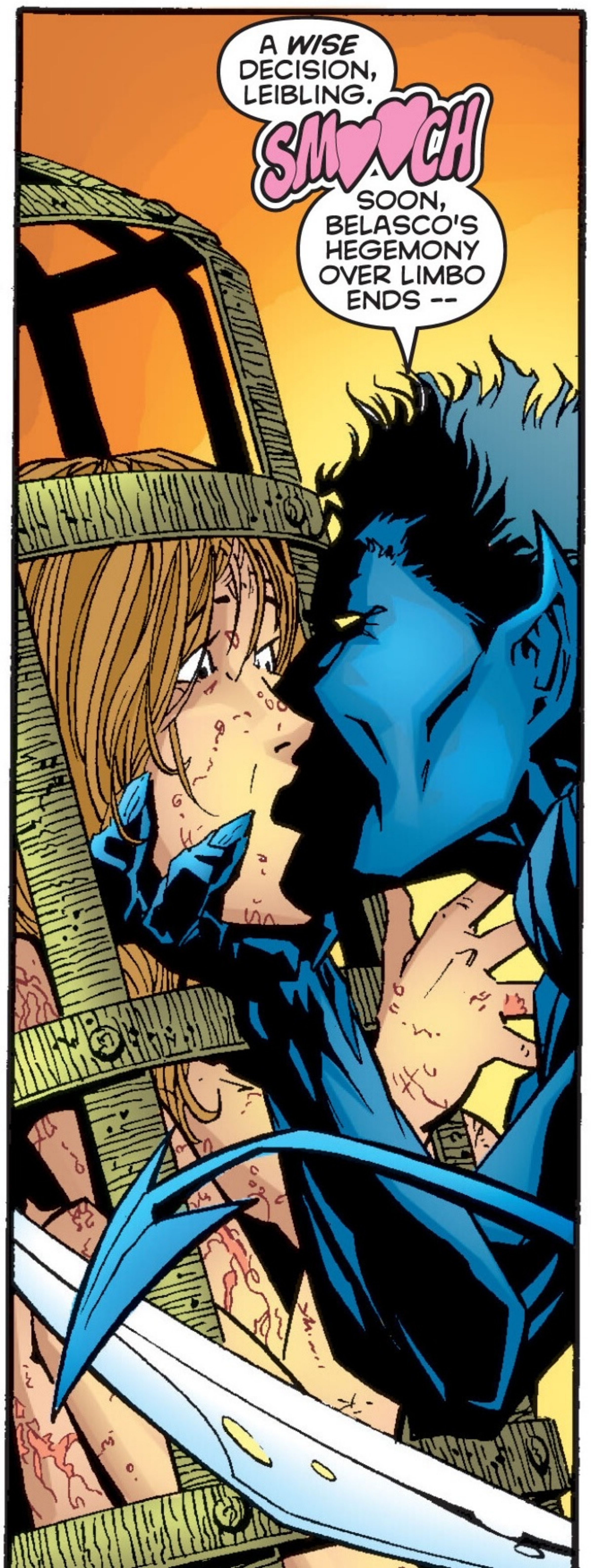
SO, THE MOUSE TOOK THE CHEESE, HMNN?
AND HE'S BROUGHT A *DATE* TO DINNER! HOW SWEET!
MUST DO YOUR OLD HEART PROUD TO SEE YOUR CHILDREN SO CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR WELFARE.
IF ONLY THEY'D ARRIVED *SOONER* -- Eh, MARGALI?
I CAN'T *BELIEVE* SHE DID THIS TO ME!
SOME ***MOTHER*** SHE IS! SWITCHING BODIES WITH HER OWN DAUGHTER...
...AND LEAVING ME TO SUFFER ENDLESS TORTURE AT THE ONE REMAINING HAND OF BELASCO THE GIMP!
WHEN I GET OUT OF HERE...
PLINK
OWWW!

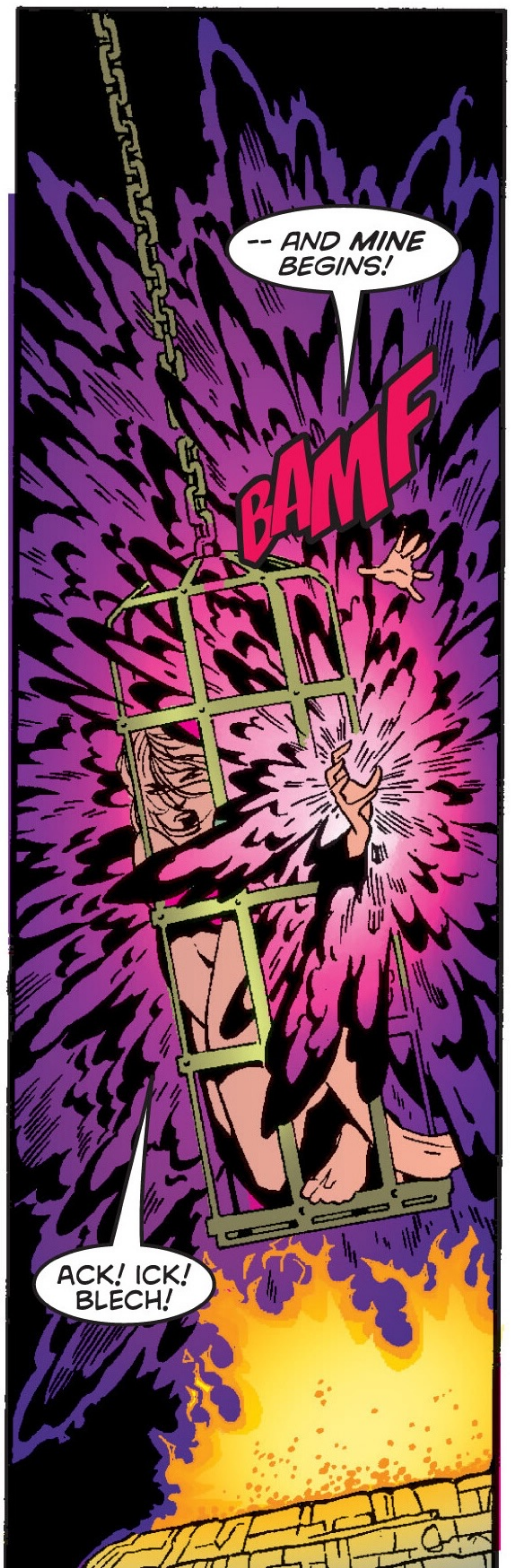
LEAVING SO SOON? THE PARTY'S JUST STARTING!
I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I *LIKE* YOU, GIRL.
A *LOT.*
AND I KNOW YOU HAVE FEELINGS FOR *ME*... JA?
WH-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT..?
DON'T ACT SO SURPRISED. I'M ON TO YOU.
YOU MAY HAVE FOOLED THAT POWER-DRUNK CRIPPLE...
...BUT DID YOU REALLY THINK I WOULDN'T RECOGNIZE ***AMANDA SEFTON'S MIND*** TRAPPED INSIDE ***MARGALI SZARDOS' BODY?*** THAT WAS MISTAKE NUMBER *ONE.*
NUMBER *TWO* WILL BE WHEN YOU ATTEMPT ANOTHER BREAKOUT, AND I BLOW THE WHISTLE ON YOUR LITTLE SCAM.
UNLESS... YOU'RE WILLING TO ***HELP*** ME?
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
IT'S VERY SIMPLE... WHISPERWHISPER WHISPER...
ARE YOU INSANE?
YOU... WANT ***ME...*** TO HELP STEAL THE *SOULSWO--*


MMMMFF!!
SHHHH! HE'LL HEAR YOU!


PHEW.
THE FOOL SUSPECTS NOTHING.


NOW... YOUR LIBERTY FOR THE SWORD.
DEAL...?
DEAL.


A WISE DECISION, LEIBLING.
SM♥♥CH
SOON, BELASCO'S HEGEMONY OVER LIMBO ENDS --


-- AND MINE BEGINS!
BAMF
ACK! ICK! BLECH!

SETTLE DOWN BACK THERE. OUR *GUESTS* HAVE ARRIVED...
ONCE INSIDE THIS GRUESOME GATE, THE ONLY WAY OUT IS *VICTORY* --
-- OR *DEATH.*
"CHILD"..? AMANDA, YOU MAY BE A COUPLE OF YEARS *OLDER* THAN I, BUT --
Mmm.
NOW, THIS JUST *SCREAMS "WILKOMMEN"*...
THIS IS NO JOKING MATTER, CHILD.
RRUMMMMBLLE
WHAT?!
DON'T TELL ME THIS PLACE HAS A WATCHDOG..?

I PREFER T'THINK O'MYSELF AS "SUPER-NATURAL SECURITY ENGINEER."
ESPECIALLY THOSE BELONGING T'DOUBLE-DEALING SORCERESSES WIT' MORE ATTITUDE THAN APTITUDE!
AN' WHEN IT COMES T'THAT PARTICULAR STRIPE O' WICKED WITCH, OL' *S'YM* HERE NEVER FORGETS A FACE!
S'YM!
ACH, NEIN! NOT *YOU!*
AIN'T DAT SWEET. *TRANSMODE INFECTION* AN' ALL, AND YA'S *STILL* REMEMBER ME!
I GUESS SOME FOLKS' MUGS'RE JUST SO UNFORGETTABLE.
AIN'T THAT RIGHT --
-- *MARGALI SZARDOS?!*
M-MOTHER..?
WHAT THE BLAZES IS GOING ON HERE?
SHOOOM
SCHRRRIP

WHATTA YA *THINK'S* GOIN' ON, ELF? YER *BREAKIN'* AND *ENTERIN'* --
-- AND I'M HERE T'MAKE SURE YA'S STAY *BROKE!*
SMASH
INCLINED AS I AM TO LEAVE YOU TO S'YM'S TENDER MERCIES, MOTHER...
BAMF
...HE'LL HAVE TO TAKE A NUMBER UNTIL *I'M* FINISHED WITH YOU!
HEY! GIMME THAT!
JEEZ, DON'T LOOK SO SURPRISED, KID.
IT AIN'T *HEADLINE NEWS* THAT YER MAMA'S A *TWO-TIMING* LITTLE --
ENOUGH!
BACK, DEMON!
BACK TO THE DAMNABLE PIT THAT SPAWNED YOU!
SHAZOW

NO! NOT THERE! ANYWHERE BUT THERE!
SHLOOP
AW, CRIPES...
QUICKLY, KURT! IF S'YM COULD SEE THROUGH MY DISGUISE, THEN SURELY BELASCO CAN TOO!
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, MOTHER, WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
WALK THE WINDING WAY IN MY SHOES BEFORE TAKING THAT JUDGMENTAL TONE WITH ME, YOUNG MAN.
MY FAILURE IN LONDON LEFT ME WEAK AND VULNERABLE. BELASCO EXPLOITED THAT WEAKNESS. MY OPTIONS WERE LIMITED.
I COULD EITHER *DIE* HIS PRISONER -- FORFEITING CUSTODY OF THE WINDING WAY WHICH IS OUR FAMILY'S CHARGE TO DEFEND --
-- OR *ESCAPE* BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY, HOWEVER DIABOLICAL.
THOUGH ODIOUS TO EVERY MATERNAL INSTINCT WITHIN ME, I CHOSE THE LATTER.
ASSUMING CONTROL OF YOUR SISTER, *JIMAINE* -- THE WOMAN YOU CALL *"AMANDA SEFTON"* -- I LITERALLY SWITCHED OUR BODIES.
HER LIFE'S ESSENCE WAS DRAWN INTO MY CAGED FORM WHILE MINE WAS LIBERATED INTO HERS... A BODY BURSTING WITH POWER.
POWER ENOUGH TO CONFRONT BELASCO AS AN EQUAL ONCE MORE...

...THOUGH I FEAR IT HAS COST ME MY *SOUL*...
PLEASE, KURT -- MY SWEET, LOVING SON -- ***FORGIVE*** YOUR POOR, OLD MOTHER. HELP HER RECLAIM WHAT'S LEFT OF HER SOUL.
IT'S ONE THING TO HAVE *DECEIVED* ME, MARGALI...TO HAVE *USED* ME.
I, WHO AM ***KIN*** SOLELY BY THE GOODNESS OF YOUR HEART THAT SEEMS LONG DEPARTED.
BUT TO ASK ME TO CALL YOU *"MOTHER"* AFTER THE WAY YOU'VE TREATED YOUR *OWN FLESH AND BLOOD* SO CALLOUSLY...SO SELFISH?
LORD GIVE ME THE STRENGTH...
...I'M NOT SURE I CAN CALL YOU ***'MOTHER'*** EVER AGAIN.
I -- I SEE...

AWWW... POOR MAMA MARGALI, *TEARIN'* THE FAMILY APART.
SEEMS T'ME YA'S COULD USE A TASTE O' YER OWN MEDICINE!
HOWZABOUT I TEAR *YOU* APART INSTEAD?
NO! RELEASE HER, S'YM!
NO! LEAVE ME TO MY FATE, KURT! GET INSIDE THAT CASTLE AND SAVE YOUR SISTER!
KRUNCH
YOU MUST STOP BELASCO! THE TWO OF YOU ARE MY ONLY --
-- HOPE...
SHLOOP
AND THEN THERE WAS *ONE.*
ONE UNARMED, MYSTICALLY-IMPOTENT MAN TRAPPED IN A TIMELESS HELL WHERE TODAY IS YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW MAY NEVER BE...
...DESPERATELY RISKING LIFE AND LIMB TO SAVE A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS FROM A DEMON LORD AND HIS HARROWING HORDES.
FIGURES THAT ONE MAN WOULD BE YOURS TRULY.
I WONDER WHAT *ERROL FLYNN* WOULD DO AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
BAMF

SURRENDER, BELASCO! IT'S *OVER!*
LOOK, SLAVE -- YOUR *GOOD* SELF'S ARRIVED. AND WITH SUCH BLUSTER!
WHY, HE ACTUALLY BELIEVES HE STANDS A CHANCE OF RESCUING HIS DEAR MOTHER!
FOOL.
JUST THE DISTRACTION I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!
THE REAL FOOL HERE, "MASTER" -- IS *YOU!*
HERE! TAKE THIS! SLAY THE DEMON LORD WHILE I RESCUE THE GIRL!
BAMF
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
KEEPING A PROMISE.
EASY, LEIBCHEN. YOU'RE SAFE N--
-- OWWWW!
ZARK
TSK.
GOOD HELP IS SOOO HARD TO FIND THESE DAYS...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, AMANDA -- I'M RIGHT HERE.
K-KURT..?
ZARK
BUT YOU WON'T BE IF WE DON'T MOVE IT! *SCHNELL!*
HSSSS
"*AMANDA*"..? YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT --?
RIGHT BODY. WRONG SOUL.
SHZAK
USING HER OWN DAUGHTER AS A "*HUMAN SHIELD*" WHILE HER POWERS REJUVENATE, EH? *CLEVER* WOMAN.
AMAZING HOW SINKING TO AN ALL-TIME *LOW* IMPRESSES YOU GHOULS.
LET'S SEE IF YOU FIND *THIS* AS IMPRESSIVE!
BAMF
PLEASE, LITTLE GIRL. YOUR MOTHER IS *HALF* THE MYSTIC I AM.
YOU ARE WAY OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE!
WHAT SHE LACKS IN SORCERY...
...I MAKE UP IN SWORDSMANSHIP! HOW DO YOU FARE?
LEFTY.

KTANG
SCURRILOUS ABUSES. HOW DROLL.
YOU ASTOUND ME EVEN MORE THAN YOU INSULT ME, HERR WAGNER.
AND WHY'S THAT...?
YOU SAW WHAT YOUR MOTHER DID TO YOUR FRIENDS...
...WHAT SHE DID TO HER OWN FLESH AND BLOOD.
KLANG
KLING
KLANG
KLING
CERTAINLY THAT FLIES IN THE FACE OF EVERY CONVENTION YOU HOLD SACRED!
YET, HERE YOU ARE -- IN A SMALL CORNER OF HELL -- RISKING YOUR MORTAL SOUL BY RALLYING TO THE AID OF A SACRILEGIOUS MONSTER...?
FZASH
AAAAHHH!
TELL ME... HOWEVER DO YOU RECONCILE *THAT*?

SHAZOW
IT'S A MATTER OF FAITH. YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.
ARRGH!
THE SWORD!
SHUNK
NOOOOO!
OH, I'M SORRY. DID YOU *NEED* THAT?
IMPUDENT WENCH! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU HAVE JUST THROWN AWAY?
POWER BEYOND RECKONING! POWER DESTINED TO BE *MINE!*

SO YOU *DREAM,* BELASCO.
Eh..? S'YM..?
SORRY, B-BOSS... SHE GOT M-ME...
MARGALI!
FEEL *THAT,* BELASCO?
THE TEPID TINGLE RUSHING DOWN YOUR SPINE..? THE NUMBING CHILL CRIPPLING YOUR FINGERTIPS..?
MOURN THESE SENSATIONS... FOR THEY ARE THE FINAL TIDES OF POWER EBBING FROM YOUR BODY, FLOWING INTO MINE.
ALL WHO INVOKE THE SACRED MYSTERIES OF THE WINDING WAY MUST SUFFER A TIME OF WEAKNESS THAT THE SCALES OF POWER MIGHT BE BALANCED.
MY TIME HAS *ENDED.*
YOURS HAS JUST *BEGUN...*
NEVER, WITCH!
THE POWER I HAVE WAITED EONS TO CLAIM IS AT LAST MINE! YOU WILL GIVE ME MY DUE!
CONSIDER IT GIVEN.
NOOOO!

AUF WIEDERSEHN, BELASCO...
...AND GOOD RIDDANCE!
JIMAINE... DEAR DAUGHTER. I AM SORRY.
I NEVER MEANT TO HURT YOU. YOU MUST BELIEVE ME.
LET ME HAVE MY BODY BACK -- SWEAR YOU'LL NEVER PULL A CHEAP STUNT LIKE THIS AGAIN -- AND MAYBE I'LL CONSIDER IT.
VERY WELL...
WHHISH
"...IT IS DONE."
Ahhh.
MUCH BETTER.
KURT...SON. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
THEN SAY NOTHING.
THOUGH YOUR ACTIONS VIOLATED EVERY BELIEF I HOLD DEAR, YOU ARE STILL MY MOTHER IN SPIRIT IF NOT BY BLOOD.
I'LL NEED SOME TIME TO SORT THIS ALL OUT FOR MYSELF.
PERHAPS I'LL BE ABLE TO FORGIVE YOU... SOMEDAY.
I LOOK FORWARD TO THAT DAY WHOLEHEARTEDLY.
TILL THEN...FARE-THEE-WELL, CHILDREN.
WHEREVER YOUR WAYS MAY WIND...

AND THAT'S IT? SHE'S GONE?
YOU KNOW MOTHER. SHE'LL BE BACK SOON ENOUGH.
AFTER ALL, SOMEONE HAS TO WATCH OVER THIS PLACE --
HEY, LADY!
ARE YOU OUR MISTRSS NOW?
YEAH! ARE YA? ARE YA?
GEE... **THANKS,** MOM.
FIRST, YOU STEAL MY BODY... THEN, YOU STICK ME WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CLEANING UP YOUR MESS SO THAT EVERYTHING IS BACK TO NORMAL?
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT KURT, BUT I AM ***NEVER*** GOING TO FORGIVE YOU FOR THIS!
SWEEET!
-SIGH-
UNGLAUBLICH! WE'RE OURSELVES AGAIN!
THAT MEANS MARGALI'S RUSE WAS A SUCCESS!
JA! SHE DUPED BELASCO INTO BELIEVING OUR ***BODIES*** DEAD --
-- WHILE OUR ***SOULS*** LIVED ON, GIVING HER STRENGTH TO DEFEAT HIM!
AND NOW AMANDA'S BROUGHT US BACK, JUST THE WAY WE WERE!
HA HA! I NEVER DOUBTED IT!
DID SO!
DID ***NOT!***

BETWEEN US, KURT. *DO* YOU FORGIVE MAMA...?
I FEEL BETTER SEEING YOU SAFE AND OUR FRIENDS ALIVE, BUT I BRISTLE KNOWING THE MEASURES WHICH HELPED ACHIEVE THIS.
THE BEST I CAN DO FOR NOW IS TO ***RESERVE JUDGMENT.***
FAIR ENOUGH. GUESS THAT LEAVES ONLY ONE LOOSE END.
CURIOUS CHOICE OF WORDS.
IS THAT WHAT I HAVE BECOME TO YOU THESE PAST MONTHS, AMANDA?
A "*LOOSE END*"? SOMETHING TO BE ***CUT...?***
NO, SILLY. SOMETHING TO BE HELD ONTO...
MY SENTIMENTS EXACTLY.

"IT BREAKS MY HEART TO SAY *GOOD-BYE*, BUT I, TOO, HAVE FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO ATTEND.
"I IMAGINE THIS IS AS *PAINFUL* FOR AMANDA AS IT IS FOR ME.
"SHE WAS NEVER COMFORTABLE WITH THE MYSTICAL *'MANIFEST DESTINY'* MOTHER FOISTED UPON HER AS A CHILD.
"NOW, SHE'S TEMPORARILY FORCED TO ASSUME THE DUAL MANTLES OF LIMBO'S PROTECTOR AND CUSTODIAN OF THE WINDING WAY...
"...NEITHER OF WHICH IS A RESPONSIBILITY SHE WOULD HAVE CHOSEN HERSELF.
"TO EXCALIBUR. TO THE X-MEN. TO PROFESSOR XAVIER.
"TO *MYSELF*.
"I KNOW OUR PATHS WILL CROSS AGAIN SOMEDAY. THEY ALWAYS DO. WE'VE BEEN LUCKY THAT WAY.
"TILL THEN, I HOPE SHE UNDERSTANDS MY AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS MARGALI, AND THAT SHE'LL *FORGIVE* ME FOR IT.
"AFTER ALL, IF YOU CAN'T FORGIVE THE ONES YOU *LOVE*..."

"...WHO CAN YOU FORGIVE?"
CRIK
KSSSSS
KSSSSS
SHING
THE END...
...OR A NEW BEGINNING?